

Max James

The 2015 Allianz Summer Academy



As the days separating us from the 2015 Allianz Summer Academy grow to weeks, we are left with lingering images of the microphone being passed around and the lake glowing in the afternoon. It seems that ASA 2015 was unanimously considered a positive experience. We might feel tempted to leave it at that, but, for the sake of the future, and for the sake of preserving the analytic frame of mind that served us so well during the summer academy, it is perhaps sensible to look back and ask, ‘what went *right*?’

The Allianz Summer Academy was certainly neither easy nor leisurely—it was no holiday. There were many challenges to overcome: how to move from vague ideas and principles to concrete policy proposals, how to tackle such abstract concepts as European identity and cultural legitimacy, how to find the right balance between cooperation and debate, how to effectively communicate with other participants from different academic and cultural backgrounds, and perhaps most demanding of all was the challenge of getting definitive results within the limited amount of time at our disposition—only four days. In a more conventional setting (think back to the first days of university), four days would just about suffice to get to know everyone, to orientate oneself in new surroundings, to learn the schedule and maybe get a rough sense of the project at hand. This is something the ASA students had to do within their first hours at Kempfenhausen, and over the next ninety-six hours, they were able to engage in dozens of thoroughly planned presentations, layers on layers of spirited debate, productive cross-national group work culminating in entirely new policy proposals, and dialogue with NGO representatives, as well as lively bonding in the evenings and newly forged friendships.

Partly to thank for this incredibly efficient performance was the intense preparation on the part of students and coordinators during the months leading up to ASA 2015. The passion participants put into the ASA can also be in part attributed to the importance and urgency of the Academy’s topic: *Europe at a Turning Point: Economic Crisis, Social Disintegration, Political Change*. This topic was, to take some words from the feedback forms, “stimulating”, “provocative”, “relevant”, “broad”, and “challenging”. While it directly pertains to the participants’ areas of academic study, the turning point at which Europe now stands is a

particularly captivating issue because it directly affects all of our futures. We all hear the same recurring soundbites and phrases in the media, but it is an incredible challenge to actually delve into the complex origins of this colossal predicament and search for concrete, realistic steps that can be taken to mitigate it. To explore the problem, one must set out from many different starting points; this is exactly what happened at ASA. Each team's report focused on a distinct dimension—the EU's political and cultural legitimacy, the economic origins of the crisis, the EU's functions legally defined, asylum politics, and youth engagement. The intersection of these different areas of research resulted in very fruitful debate, and when it came to discussing new topics in cross-national teams and proposing specific policies, the integration of these different perspectives and areas of expertise was unmistakably evident. Finally, the collaboration of the NGOs on day four provided for a stress test, and the results were outstanding. Remarkable was the unobtrusive confidence of the students; the participants did not complaisantly accept every bit of feedback from the NGO representatives, but rather offered resistance on some points while adopting others, generating a healthy dialogue. This confidence clearly demonstrated both the rigor of the students' work and the unconventionally free and open intellectual atmosphere.

At the 2015 ASA, people came together. This meant a lot more than just being in the same place at the same time—everybody brought their ideas with them, and the ideas collided and splintered and merged. These interactions would not have taken place had everyone's ideas been identical; luckily, the Academy's structure ensured a vibrant diversity of perspectives. Different environments and different cultures foster different ways of thinking, and at Kempfenhausen we were able to observe and take part in the intersection of these ideas. And beyond entailing an intersection of ideas about the future of the European Project, ASA 2015 was an intersection of people and their stories and songs and jokes and traditions. This is why we will remember it fondly.



Photos: Stefan Roch